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PRAETERITA.



# PRAETERITA.

BY

WILLIAM LANCASTER.

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A RENUNCIATION.

LIGHT of love and cold of brain,  
Shall I trust thy tears,  
Linking hand on hand again !  
In untutor'd years  
Ah, but this was sweet.

Ripe lips are not venom-free,  
Gentle eyes, nor virgin zone.  
Thy snow-tint that dazzled me,  
Snows that cover stone.  
Peace, have done, 'tis well.

Light elsewhere thy marsh-wisp's flame,

There are fools will drown :

Wrong is proud : lure other game ;

I have sat me down.

Let the times roll round.

Wearied of thy glossy smile,

Patching faith from flaw,

Cancel false and warrant guile ;

Bonds are lath and straw !

I have done with thee.

Plough the rock and reap the sand,

Wear thy sickly smiles for gain,

Blight the lips that touch thy hand,

'Till thy withered lips in vain

Lisp unheeded lies.

KNEEL NOT AND LEAVE ME.

KNEEL not and leave me : mirth is in its grave.

True friend, sweet words were ours, sweet  
words decay.

Believe, the perfume once this violet gave

Lives—lives no more though mute tears answer  
“nay.”

Break off delay !

Dead, Love is dead ! Ay, cancelled all his due.

We say he mocks repose—we cannot tell—

Close up his eyes and crown his head with rue,

Say in his ear, Sweet Love, farewell ! farewell !

A last, low knell.

Forbear to move him. Peace, why should we  
stay?

Go back no more to listen for his tread.

Resume our old calm face of every day:

Not all our kneeling turns that sacred head

Long dear, long dead!

And go thou forth without one thought before:

Loss to remain and wisdom to begone—

So make this wise heart stranger and still more

To teach us severed ways and dull our moan.

Go forth alone!



## RETROSPECT.

I F in yonder simple time  
We have pondered on a face,  
Draining out a poison'd wine  
From the lips of first embrace ;

If with hot cheek and low breath  
We have coined a mint of vows,  
Binding for an amaranth wreath,  
Half-shed roses on our brows ;—

Till the cunning time's recoil  
All the sacred dream destroys,  
And resuming self must soil  
Vengeful its memorial joys.

Holding light our richer hour,  
Half in envy, half in craft ;  
Sullen-weary at the flower  
Wither'd on its autumn shaft.

Dribbling o'er the fleeted time,  
Fancied rapture, fancied woes,  
Drawling like a ribald rhyme  
In a ballad-monger's nose,

Tell the boys, and make disdain  
Where the canker'd thought has trod :  
Crushing in with tainted feet  
Veil and shrine of that still God

Loved of youth, and seal'd with fear  
In the secret-warded breast,  
Haled with mock or shallow jeer  
From the haven of its rest.

Better hoard our hearts from love  
Narrow'd in from burning tears—  
At its taste a noisy drove,  
Traitors in the after-years.

## AURORA.

BY the primrose bank and meadow,  
Rippling curls, rare feet in shadow,

Whither, sweet, away?

Listen, rise and follow lightly,

Wind the fluttering fingers tightly;

Greet thee, love, to-day.

Young and lonely keep no measure.

Mint of youth is current treasure,

Age but dross and scorn.

Many sweet mouths are not tasted,

Sweetest kisses won and wasted,

Hour and year foresworn.

When the ripe hour whispers 'reap,'  
Turning towards that loveless sleep  
    Who would sourly say,  
'Fresh cheeks wear not weeping stain.  
Love is spoil, and wedded pain  
    Taint their rose away.'

Answer, love, "though love's best sweet,  
Like an angel's glorious feet,  
    Flash and pass no more,—  
Answer, sweet, " love may not last,  
But the perfume of its past  
    Lives in riper store."

Wavering sets the longest noon:  
Winter crowns the fiercest June,  
    Summer melts the snow.  
Eyes can answer, hands as well,  
Rusting years unlearn their spell:  
    Answer, dearest, so --

Fortune plays not twice the giver :

Leave it once and lose it ever.

As we speak 'tis flown.

Grasp it with no palsied hand,

Bend the years at thy command,

Now and thrice thine own.

HE MAY WHO CAN.

WE are wise, the world is old,  
Antic changes shift and hold,  
Boys will swear and maids will weep,  
Weep and smile again.

Songs are for an April breast,  
Feathers for a gleaming crest,  
They may wake that need no sleep,  
Sing, that feel no pain.

In the race youth's limbs are fleetest,  
And a boy's mouth kisses sweetest ;  
Rusty-tooth and iron-grey,  
Mope beside thy fire.

Changes push us on our grave ;

Can we keep the orts we have ?

Ours is but a waning day,

What should we desire ?



SIGH, HEART, BREAK NOT.

SIGH, heart, break not. Sky-lark, wake not,  
Till my love be wakened and away,  
Till his kisses, fresh as summer,  
Wake ere the roses wake at opening day.

Stay thy warm gleam, amber morn-beam,  
While his warm mouth on my cheek will stay.  
Calm seas, breathe not sweet day-April:  
Calm eyes, sleep not, till ye must away.

My fleet new love, my sweet true dove,  
Art thou gone for ever or a day?  
Ill wind blow not, ill change grow not:  
Go thy gate, but be not long away.

TOO FAIR TO LAST.

LOVE of love, and light of light,  
Love has limit of delight,  
Dream and dream, sweet child, again,  
Here is no unrest.

Love hath set our moist lips fast,  
Kiss one kiss, the longest last.  
What tho' weeping-ripe, my girl,  
Smile thro' rainy eyes.

Summer from the bough has past,  
And the shreds of autumn cast :  
What, dear heart, if love be low  
Under foot as soon !

We have had a tender suit,  
Lovely words are breath and mute,  
Still'd with tears in richest noon,  
Gathered to the dead.

Kiss and touch my hand, and part :  
Sighs are farewell of the heart.  
Dream a moment in thy joy,  
Wake a world of years.

## THE PRODIGAL.

THE scath of sin is on my brow like lead.

The draff of swine is on my lips for bread.

Father, I know thy glory is not dead.

I will arise.

The servants in thy house are cloth'd and fed

Full and to spare. I perish here for bread.

My sin hath cloth'd thy presence with such dread,

I may not rise.

Mine, mine the guilt, all trespass deep and red :

Thine, thine the mercy on this fallen head.

Naked I come, yet thou shalt give me bread.

I will arise.

THE  
ISOLATION OF SELFISH PROSPERITY.

TO strive is something, yet to win is more.  
The crownèd angels from their state declined ;  
And traitor pride shall make the nations blind  
In days to come as in the days of yore.

To win is something, but content is more.  
The brooks, the fountains, and the crystal meres  
Are things forbidden in the restless ears  
Of Care ; he tastes no beauty in the shore

Hung with the morning, for his dreams are sere :  
And, though he seat him on a throne of gold,  
He cannot hear the birds sing as of old ;  
And all his earlier self is grown a fear.

*THE ISOLATION OF SELFISH PROSPERITY.*

His eyes are on the forward region spent :  
The past let fools repair, and girls regret,  
And first-love dreams leave dotards' eyelids wet ;  
Such things are gone. He cares not how they  
went.

Canker'd with self and his false Mammon-King,  
He boasts at large, "I am not as my race,  
With me men's petty loves, dreams, ends give  
place  
To high indifference ; hours can never ring

Love changes, matter for a neighbour's sneer,  
On my mail'd breast : let boys and girls go whine  
The shed rose-leaves of passion deem'd divine.  
I am not of their weakness, shall I fear !

## THE CHEERFUL AGE.

MORE wrinkles score my brow than frowns,  
    Uncheck'd my merry vein,  
For age, that gives us balder crowns,  
    Makes ripe the under brain.

Of something yet they rob us still  
    These years that make us wise,  
For maids grow fair as then they were,  
    But we look with other eyes.

And what was music to our youth  
    Is discord to our age :  
'The songs we loved as vivid truth  
    Are tinsell'd verbiage.

We cannot mend the race of things  
That jostles towards solution :  
'Twill see us out thro' falls and springs,  
One stride more near conclusion.

There's sorrow if we earth it out,  
But ease if we prefer it.  
Then leave the thorn and pluck the rose,  
And next thy bosom wear it.

O'er leagues of coast the rough foam flings :  
There still are quiet havens ;  
If o'er our head one sky-lark sings  
We heed not twenty ravens.

This world is in a slippery state,  
And men are fools to grumble,  
If, like a boy who learns to skate,  
They marvel at a tumble.



But wisdom this and wisdom that,  
And every man her master,  
While only hearts of season'd proof  
Can weather life's disaster.

Can find youth sped and bid him speed,  
Nor question out the reason ;  
Then cheerly raise the latch to age,  
A quest, tho' sour, in season.

ECHO, CLOUD, AND BREEZE.

ECHO, hast thou heard my love go by,  
Hath her sweet breath touch'd in ecstasy  
Thine old voice to answer silverly?  
Streamlets tinkle at her rosy feet,  
Fountains dimple back her glancing sweet,  
Daisies whisper, 'take us, dove, with thee.'

Idle cloudlet brooding near the sun,  
Float and touch the hill-crowns one by one,  
Tell me, is she here or is she there?  
Bend thy melting eyes on slope and rock.  
Seek her thro' the heaths, the climbing flock:  
Never hast thou sought a thing so fair.

Breeze, that falling catchest on the mere,  
Swallow-like to ruffle there and here

Freckling silver o'er the smooth dark creek,  
Hast thou felt the flutter of her gown,  
Caught aside one little ringlet brown,  
Tasted, passing, at the dainty cheek !

Reedy echoes from the ambling rill,  
Sleepy cloud, come faster. Voices chill

Whisper rainless thro' the fresh-lipp'd wind.  
Echo, cloud, and breeze, by down or dale,  
Aid my restless eyes ; for, find or fail,  
Seek the harder and the soonest find.

A FROSTY DAY.

FROST-flowers pattern round the latch,  
Cloud nor breeze dissolves the clime.

Field-grass wears a silver thatch,  
Every paling edged with rime,

When the waves are solid floor,  
And the clods are iron-bound,  
And the boughs are crystall'd hoar,  
And the red leaf nail'd a-ground.

When the fieldfare's flight is slow,  
And a rosy vapour rim,  
Now the sun is small and low,  
Belts along the region dim.

When the ice-crack flies and flaws,  
Shore to shore, with thunder shock,  
Deeper than the evening daws,  
Clearer than the village clock.

When the rusty blackbird strips,  
Bunch by bunch, the coral thorn,  
And the pale day-crescent dips  
New to heaven a slender horn.

AT LAST.

WE toss and twist upon a restless bed ;

Sleep comes at last.

Our Love denies, and yet denies again,

But yields at last.

The apple grows and ripens many days,

But falls at last.

And we are riped with joy, and marr'd with tears,

But end at last !

## THE POWER OF INTERVAL.

A FAIR girl tripping out to meet her love  
Trimm'd in her best, fresh as a clover-bud.  
An old crone leaning at an ember'd fire,  
Short-breath'd in sighs and mumblings to herself—  
And all the interval of stealing years  
To make that this, and one by one detach  
Some excellent condition, till Despair  
Faint at the vision, sadly, fiercely blinds  
Her burning eyes on her forgetful hands.

## HYPERBOLE.

R IPE on the eyelids as a precious dream,  
Soft on the lip as lips of coral seam,  
Sweet on the ear as an imagined stream  
Threading between the full woods and the moon.

Mellow as harvest song at steamy noon,  
Lovely as cuckoo's voice that cometh soon,  
Drowsy as music of the branch in June,  
And tremulous linnet-pipe by broom or thorn.

Or shall I search the silver rose of morn,  
The royal fisher's wing, the fleecy lawn  
Of mountain lamb, all hues in nature born,  
To find my Love's compare or deck her grace?



Merry sets his mellow life  
Who, where rusty shocks are rife,  
Whistles off his weary load  
Wearing to each year.

Sours he not with friendship's treason,  
Or some sweet love strange in season,  
Ripe in manhood, ripe in heart,  
Whole and sound and clear.

A BALLAD.

I KNOW not how I loved at all ;  
Your presence in surprise  
Came on me like a trumpet call,  
And in a bright disguise ;

A soldier in a burnish'd sheen  
Of scale and listed blue,  
With jangling armour and a mien  
Of conquest as your due.

The rose of youth upon your face,  
My name upon your lips,  
The rippling trees, the lonely place,  
The sails of harbour ships,

The time and all so fairy-sweet,--  
That at each word we did say,  
I felt the time for love so meet  
That love I gave away.

How fair the trailer's ruddy pride  
Blazed out on cottage eaves,  
How sweet when all the country-side  
Shows like a wood of sheaves.

How dear in middle harvesting  
The reaper's roundel clear,  
Where shakes the field-lark out its wing  
From threaded gossamere.

Sweet fickle Love, you grow for some,  
And grip them to their grief,  
As sudden as the red-wings come  
At the full fall of the leaf.

And sudden as the swallows go  
That muster for the sea,  
You pass away before we know,  
And wounded hearts are we.

'Tis not that, love, in sentence trim  
You reel off loving talk,  
When pensive by the river brim  
With hand on hand we walk.

It is not that you press my arm,  
Or soften voice and eyes,  
Or rivet hand, and glibly warm  
The fervour of your sighs.

Who tells true heart from feigning deep,  
How crafty-wise were he,  
He knows the hill-side sheep from sheep,  
The mountain-bee from bee.

We take on trust, forsooth we must,  
And reckon as we see ;  
But, O my love, if false thou prove,  
What recks all else to me !

AN EVENING BY THE FIRE.

WHEN frogs pipe out in dripping dykes,  
And autumn wolds are fallow :

When pigeons leave the stubble spikes,  
And homeward oxen bellow :

And singing under greying blue,  
The ditcher and his fellow  
Come drenched knee-deep from pasture-dew,  
And foot-clogged from the fallow :

The black frost in the white frost's wake  
May nip the marsh-buds yellow,  
And kindling under branch and brake  
The raying sunset mellow :

Thro' branch and towards the trysting style

Where skims each mustering swallow ;

As sits the lass to rest awhile,

Strolls up some sheepish fellow.

Our sun-track draws tonight as this

That floods the level fallow :

Von maiden's cheek is ripe to kiss,

But ours are lank and hollow.

Our youth is gone, like this fair day,

Our rusty bones shall follow,

And rest they say, for heads of gray,

Comes on a churchyard pillow.

So runs it well, so runs it ill,

What must be we must swallow.

We'll keep a merry heart up still,

Unsered, fresh, young, and callow.

Draw closer to the blaze, old friend,

Our ale is stiff and mellow.

We have not much more light to spend,

Two guttered ends of tallow.

But I will grasp thee by the hand,

What tho' thy cheek be yellow,

I'll swear that thro' the whole broad land

Ne'er walked a better fellow.



## PHILOCTETES.

SILENCE on silence treads at each low morn.

Pain and new pain, some glimpse of painless sleep,  
And waking to old anguish and new day :  
Blasted of glory, sundered from my kind :  
My hearth, my realm, the lips that love me, lost :  
So runs it. 'Tis some courage to keep life  
Where life is worthless, and on feeble stay  
To dwell in hope of better till we die.

I hate this island steep, this seam of beach.  
This ample desolation of gray rock  
Man tills not : and man reaps not, woe is me !  
No voices, save stress-landed mariners  
Leaning in ring with eyebrow-level wrists

To watch the scummy rack and buzzing waves,  
Toss me a word in pity : stare and pass  
Grinding a clumsy jest or surly sneer.  
Yet in their talk I gather waifs and strays  
Of that great Trojan battle how it goes ;  
Of beardless youths who gain down heaven with  
    deeds,  
And all the noise and turmoil of the thing,  
Deed quenching deed, and echo's swollen boast,  
While I am rotting here and touch no praise.

Ye have done well to leave me. 'Tis most wise,  
And friendly too, expedient, generous :  
Why this is bounty's crown ; I have deserved  
No less than a sick hound : full thanks for all.  
My kings and comrades, ye are wise and brave,  
As wise as brave, and brave your chiefest voice  
Of foxy Ithaca : 'twas nobly said,  
"Pack out the carrion on this leeward Isle.  
We need no wounded leaders, no, nor fear.  
His men and ships *are* needed ; they sail on :

‘They cannot heal him, and our need is great.’  
 Why, man, this is true valour and no theft :  
 I could not quit thee, and kings cannot steal.  
 But if I meet thy foxship afterdays,  
 With half an arm to raise and half a spear,  
 I’ll mar that serpent face and false gray smile,  
 And leave thy surgy rock without a king.

Alas, alas, how mean a thing am I  
 To rail and threat and bluster like a God.  
 The old pain trembles thro’ me marrow-deep,  
 A quivering mass of earth, than earth no more,  
 Earth gifted with a cunning power of pain,  
 Full knowledge of its fall and loathsomeness,  
 Craving for enterprize in impotence,  
 Some little sleep and all the rest a pain—  
 Shall such a thing have pride or hoard revenge !

I loathe the glancing sameness of this brine,  
 Its hissing suck of waves, its equal face.  
 I loathe the toss of sails, the pass of clouds,

The white wings curving on the tawny rocks,  
The evening and the dawning and the day.  
We thrive by action, I am chained from all,  
And I forget the pleasure of this earth,  
Of all but pain and slow time dispossess'd.

Yet is there hope ; slow hope yet comfort sure,  
I had forgot it in my wrath and pain.  
Is there no oracle ? Troy cannot fall.  
I guard thine arrows, Heracles divine,  
And Troy falls not without them year on year.  
I hoard them as the marrow of my bones,  
Sweet nurses to revenge. Oh, fate is just.  
Ye reap, my kings, wound-harvest and much dead,  
Thinn'd troops, and kingdoms waned to wrack at  
home,  
And gloomy faces by a gloomy sea,  
And firm-braced Troy before, the sponge of toil,  
And all your warring as an idle dream.

I can abide my hour it is so sure,

I lean on this unstumbling oracle,  
And nourish hope, till worn with many woes  
The haught Kings fall in thinking on the wreck  
They left by Lemnos and the archer hand  
Once fellowless in Hellas. They shall come,  
By Zeus I swear it, they shall come in shame,  
And stand in shame before the man they wrong'd  
And weeded out as refuse. See, they bend,  
Pestilent faces crusted in meek smiles,  
And supple eyes and all the fawn of need :  
And one mouths out on justice, gratitude,  
The cause of Hellas. Then another smooths  
My name with praise, and all the worthy ring  
Lisp sympathy with dew on glassy cheeks.

Sweet oracle, thou climax of revenge,  
I will wear out my painful coil in joy,  
Voiceless of all complaining, firm and sure  
The Gods are just, and compensation comes.

## SEMELE.

MY sense is dull. The tremulous evening glows :  
The weeds of night coast round her lucid edge,  
Yoked under bulks of tributary cloud.

The leaves are shaken on the forest flowers,  
And silent as the silence of a shrine  
Lies a great power of sunset on the groves.  
Grayly the fingered shadows dwell between  
The reaching chestnut branches. Gray the mask  
Of twilight, and the bleak unmellow speed  
Of blindness on the visage of fresh hills.

My soul is melted in pale aching dreams,  
I feign some nearing issue in new time,  
On which I wait, for which I think and move :  
A haunting drift that guides me by a glimpse  
To lovely things and meteor affluence.

I wander in my silence, incomplete.  
My lonely feet are dew'd in chilly flowers,  
And I am full of fever and alone—  
The cup without its acorn, the brook bed  
Dry of its stream, the chalice ebb'd of wine,  
The deep night listening for its rising morn,  
The droughty plain that sees the rain-cloud pause,  
And hears the falling drift sing towards its breast.

The voice of dreams is sweet upon my brain,  
Has fed me on thin comfort many a day,  
Since all my mind was tender, and a child  
Rich in the girlish impulse of ripe dreams  
I threw my song upon the wind, or pored  
On all this glorious nature and its blaze  
Ineffable, enormous. I could guess  
The thriving summer toward, as the globe  
That metes the still year's process, and the edge  
Of March-days sweetened in warm April's tread—  
Levied the wavering clouds to do him praise,  
And all their folds were bright against his head.

I pondered out the wonder-veiling years,  
And still I dwelt on light in all my dreams,  
Some strange great yearning : dim on forest-waves  
The large eye-blinding radiance sheeted out,  
And withered up the film of hooded peaks  
To set their dinted vales with faltering fires :  
As cloudy hollows claspt in buoyant green  
Took savour of wood-incense from the drench  
Of lime-boughs limp with perfume-searching rains,—  
Methought at times the wildered spirit paused  
In blindness on an edge of glory, faint  
And trembling. Milky shiverings of cloud  
Crept in meridian smoothly towards a sea  
Where evening held in bright her western bars,  
And all the full blue level glow'd again  
Under a glowing sky.

I speak my soul  
With words and sign and symbols of weak sound.  
I cannot clasp the meaning as it lies,  
I cannot blend with shallow speech my dream.  
I, reeling from the level of my brain,



Would mix with flowery essence, or exchange  
Life with an amaranth, so look heaven in face  
A summer thro', and draw the zenith dews  
Drizzled between the twilights, ere the streak  
Of morning touch celestial thro' the halls  
Of Nature, with the echo of a bird,  
A startled leaflet, and an opening flower.

And thus I read the sacred loveliness  
Of Heaven's clear face, unseen as stars by day,  
But there no less tho' weak eyes reach them not—  
'Till on the vagueness of thin thought there came  
Substantial impress: on the dreamy mist  
A presence and a deity behind  
Concentred yet pervasive. Silent eyes  
Gave greeting, and, in wordless promise, sign  
Of imminent revealment, and great lights,  
Deep harmony and thunders, as the voice  
Of breakers breaking on low-margin'd seas.

Thou all-enfolding ether, thou clear God,  
Shall I profane thy fair immensity,

Or bound thy boundless essence in a name  
Spoken as men can speak it between lips  
That tell but half their thought, whose thought is  
weak ?

Thou whom I only guess thro' my desire,  
A far attainment, inmost prophecy,  
An instinct and a voiceless oracle,  
To enter where we would be, and be one ;  
There, face to face, to touch and be complete,  
And shed our craving from us like old leaves  
That grate beside the crowded knots of spring.

Come, thou great bliss, I have been patient long.  
My lonely arms entreat thee from thy state.  
Come, thro' the vaulted blue a burning sun.  
Come, as the night comes, fielded round with stars !  
My soul is throbbing, as a moonless sea,  
Flood out thy rich beams full upon her breast !

SAUL.

MY son, my son, there is no stir of hope.

These days are rough, and ere my latest fight  
The graying twilight blinds the morning's eyes.

Deep have I tasted those accursed wells  
Of disobedience: deeply wasted rule,  
And made my throne a haven for the deed.  
Come, come, the proudest soul that ever trod  
Is pillage merely for some crushing hour,  
And that is stored for all. I cannot mend,  
And will not shrink. Fear mends not chance or  
change.

Perchance my doom is ripe and I must fall.

I murmur not, for I have much endur'd.  
Nor prosper'd in my sin or in my pride,

But fever'd out my heart from shame to shame :  
Shame is as praise where all is set to fall.

I that have dared to tamper with the dead,  
To break the ancient prophet from his sleep,  
Deliberate in election to foreknow  
The drift of evil, and made firm my face  
Beyond the scale of horror, to untear  
Death and their secrets from the denizens  
Of his oblivious city,—shall I shrink  
Or bate one inch off purpose till the end?

I stand between the oracles of doom.  
The wild wind passes on the cloudy banks  
And raises out an interval of light.  
This is the day, my soul. This is the day.  
Shall I sit down and weep? What help to weep,  
What harm to die? Small profit this my rule :  
A thing of custom merely that outgrows  
The will to move it from us, which removed  
There lives beyond no comfort in the light :

But craving, that in realmless abstinence  
Rivets the ache of loss, where loss is gain  
To limit old confusions, which of old  
Raught from my helm the garland of its praise  
And set my face to this perpetual rest.

Could I unlive my trespass, and the doom  
Of this day's fight, to tread again the ways  
Of earthly custom, taste smooth hope once more,  
Be man with men, talk trifles, wake and sleep :  
Should I be changed ? Small change till I be dead.  
What years have grained and ringed into the tree  
Falls not for one night's shaking. I am proud,  
I cannot take meek eyes and smile upon  
My shepherd rival. He or I must cease.  
My realm is narrow for a second King.  
He prospers as I perish, for his hands  
Are strengthened and some demon works me down,  
Else had I crushed this stripling at his sheep.

I never sought this ruling curse of rule.

Who shall convince me that I sought to rule?  
I sinn'd not as I was and sought no higher.  
How then is this my guilt to fail beneath  
Unwilling burden? I have done some wrong,  
But royal trespass this, and such as Kings  
Could only sin. The wrong is theirs that chose.

They huddled on my rule and I was King.  
They cannot twit me with an ounce of fear  
Whenas I led their armies. That at least  
Is something is this waning of my name.  
What else is left? To arm and surely die.  
It shall be done. 'Tis easier passage straight  
Where there is turning none and no retreat.

Perchance the spirit mock'd me to my doom.  
It is a lying spirit from its lord  
Of lies and fire, who steals a holy shape:  
My sick brain cannot sunder false and true—  
Nay, for I heard his voice and heard my doom,  
And he that sleeps at Ramah will not lie.

Give me my sword. Philistia, lo I come!  
Glut all your spears upon me. 'Tis more brave  
To wrestle with a certainty of doom  
Than to be still in apathy and die.  
I know the issue. I am set to fall.  
What need to redden eyes with slavish tears?  
I feel the end. I front it and it comes.

## MINOS.

I HAVE framed my life to ruling, ruling men.

This is the next prerogative to Zeus,  
Who wears the cope of Kingship over Gods,  
Who metes me out a little lording nook  
Beside his spacious glory for a time,  
Until the tale of years disorb my hand,  
And set a graveward darkness on my brain  
Decreed to earth, and make my voice a dream.  
So thou rule on, no wrinkle in thy crown,  
Zeus, and thy full lips fade not thro' the years.

What is more noble in our cloudy day  
Of shift and error than to nourish peace,  
And hold the sacred justice of a king  
With marble purpose firm from day to year,



Wedding the strength of order to our realm :  
Not less the King shall watch and wait he may  
Unroot confusion, the blind mole that mines  
The seat of princes from their solid stay.

This is my mark of purpose slowly won,  
Most slowly : year on year the long years went  
And won me something nearer. In firm eyes  
I held the wavering beacon. And men came,  
My councillors, and laughed against my dreams  
Of truth and right. They said the world was  
young,

Too young to cramp her steps by shackled rule,  
And crush out man's fierce nature by the square.  
To portion with one justice friend and slave,  
Amercing equal penalties between  
The hands that tugged our battles and the hind  
Of capture,—strangled empire in its germ ;  
This led a flush'd sedition at its heels,  
This rent the key-stone arch of policy,  
This palsied friendly nerve, this moved the feet

Of rival armies, numb ingratitude,  
This made shrewd fighters deal with lazy strokes.

But I nor fail'd nor wander'd from my drift,  
And king it still, unseated by the storm,  
Calm in the wreck on neighbour thrones, secure,  
Where others crack'd to core whose root was  
Wrong.

Obedience, Reason, Discipline, Reserve,  
On these I founded empire as strong hills,  
That warp not nor are shaken thro' the years.  
I slept and waken'd till their seed was grown.  
I watch'd them as the Sun doth watch the Sea,  
Stretching an arm of glory from the verge  
To shield her all the morning of his beams.

Much have I done: that much is but a brand  
From that remainder forest which shall fall  
Before their sturdy pioneers lead on  
Freedom and Justice and the Golden Age.

The white sea glimmers thro' the palace shafts.  
My galleys beat to mainland rich in store,  
Rich in the wealth that smooths the lives of men  
And gives them higher natures. Out at sea  
A scarf of air-mist wavers on the moon.  
The torrents hold their music, and I scent  
A riping vintage from the Cretan hills,  
And harvest on illimitable plains.  
My people turn to rest secure of wrong,  
And not one lip but loves me for its sleep.

I have lived to great result, have seen my wish  
Ripen to deed, sole attribute of Gods:  
Gods only choose the means and grasp the end.  
For, as in dreams that on some purpose verge  
We waken ere that purpose, so our ears  
Shall seldom hear the wind among the boughs  
Whose seed was ours.

I am a man with men.  
This is unstable glory. I am old,  
And I, that love my work, must leave my work,

The eldest moving life between the suns.  
I, that have wrestled doom aside to glance  
An hour upon completion, glance and die.  
The grave has had full patience. Yet I weep  
To leave my solid toil and this fair land  
To weaker keeping. Shall this icy thought  
Comfort my bones, that all my work is wind,  
This Isle a cry of pirates?

O my heart!

I hunger not this life as fools desire  
A selfish dream of food and sleep and lust.  
I am content. The corner of a mound  
Is room enough, if I could find a hand  
Wherein to trust my sceptre, so to sleep.

*with the*

A WISP OF EPIC.

AND the gray King strode fiercely from the  
board,

And wrench'd away and trampled on his crown :

But she, the princess, arm'd his neck and clung

With quivering lips and dreamy staring eyes.

And down the board the level feasters, each

And all, one impulse, rose like that long wave

When tide-flood takes a river. Vassal peers

Enring'd their muttering knots ; but, midmost, knelt

A knight who bled between his shattered mails.

He, reeling from his saddle, sick and blind,

Scared thro' the courts with missive, blank as  
death—

Had burst their feast like Pestilence, and cried

Their frontier army broken, back and edge,  
In ambush: all its bravest mown away:  
And, woe the while, their prince—the rumour gave  
Lost in the trammell'd tangle of the slain,  
Or wounded—yet unfound—but likelier slain.

So all that night the gray King and his child  
Clomb a high chamber o'er the woods, and watch'd  
That way their army went by mountains based  
In shelves of ilex—went, but when should come?  
And, ere heaven's stubborn bar and sable screen  
Crumbled in purple chains of sailing shower  
And bared the captive morning in her cell,—  
Their lean hope wasted on the watchers' eyes  
And fled from the impenetrable mask  
Dead, as the new light lingered.

That wan king

Leant to each palm a hoary cheek, and sate,  
His owl-white hairs shed out, his reedy beard  
Held what he wept and thro' its woof each moan  
Trembled in vapour, and his lids were set.

But she, an eloquent presence of despair,  
Drew, regal, all her height: her lordly eyes,  
Robed in the morning that she sought in vain  
Beyond the casement, rested on the void  
Gazing thro' distance: horn and hoof were dumb  
Between the sightless woods, but darkness held  
Blind as her soul was darkened.

Last, she turned

And found the old King moaning in a trance,  
Not wholly wakeful, drowsy in his pain,  
Mowing and whispering; and she said,

“My Liege,

I cannot taste thin morning from the downs.  
A grieving wind is on the troubled cloud,  
But here it comes not thro' the woolly mist.  
A false red dawn hath yonder ridge bestrid  
To cheat the midnight of her dotard hours:  
Watch'd morning loiters from the watchers' eyes.  
No throbbing clarion melts against the wall  
Of this cool dark: the gray night round is dumb,  
And ear and eyeball tingle with the strain

Of void and silence : from the inmost heart  
Of woodland fails all motion : calm the hills  
As flaky tossings frozen in nebulous seas.  
I will not cheat thy comfort that they come.

She shook her accents from her as she stood  
With raised and lucent elbows ; here declined  
Her rich and languid head against her palms ;  
Tight fingers counter-knit behind the black  
And banded hair, convulsive in their close,  
So strained it in her passion and her pain.  
Not less the wild expectance in her eyes  
Refrained their tears, as mute the smooth pure lips  
Tighten'd in restless workings on the pearl,  
Barrier of their lost music.

So they twain

Spake nothing, yet in gloom the old King's eyes  
Glittered with beaded anguish, for his age  
Was as an infant's with an honest face  
Denying not its weakness : and the nails  
Of his lean fingers grated on his robe



Crackling the furry velvets, fold on fold,  
And his vein'd wrists were palsied as they strove  
Among the foldings, till his voice came low  
As a weak wind is scared and faint among  
The heavy clusters of primeval woods,  
And crisps but never lifts them till the rain  
Utterly stamp it dead,——

‘Dissolve and die,  
My withered brain : the tide is set ; the dust  
Is on my temples. Empire of dumb Sleep,  
Thine I am owed and thine I come. The change  
Is terrorless, my rule a crumbled dream.  
Look in my face, O daughter, search it well,  
I live to speak a blind and horrible word,  
Ay so, as you to hear it : lo ! ’tis said—  
He will return no more and yet no more !  
Why so it is, the silent hand takes all.  
There is no mercy that the flower is fair  
But speedier scythes of ambush. What revenge  
Is there against the inevitable ? Lift  
Thy prophet eyes, usurp the right to see

Harvest of curses on the harmless dead,  
The vermin dregs of war's encrimson'd cup  
Spilling confusions on our wholesome land—  
All in this bitter word 'my son is dead !'  
She moved not as he ended in her calm,  
She would not weep, she could not comfort him,  
But at her eyes the chamber spun, and fierce,  
Fierce as a scathe, the wrestle at her heart  
Tightens and throbs, or subtler shudders rive  
The disunited, desolated hands  
Listless of use and nervelessly disspread,  
At length she labour'd tremulous reply,  
Passionate answer, and her lips were pale.

'Die not, great heart, unfinish'd ere thy noon  
Fail not firm star of glory from thy seat  
Aerial, rapt above our shallow dreams.  
So many barren things grow fat and thrive  
And taste no evil all their barren days,  
That this, our love, can never quench so soon,  
Whose course was on the shoreless seas of fame.

His wake one tremulous glory, and full stars  
Leapt in the rolling amber at his prow.  
Die and we die : our breath is nothing worth ;  
We are but shadows moving in Thy will,  
Thine intercepted radiance makes us be.  
The empire of thy worship is not dead,  
But prospers glowing rich in fruit and sign.'

And now the broad and sunless vapour-downs  
Shook their sloped limbs from coiling haze : behind  
From cloud to cloud the purple caught, one star  
Crept to the void before it : ragged lights  
Struck in the crowded peaks and cloudy zones,  
And then the full round splendour of the day.

Till there was warning mutter'd thro' the stems  
Of storied pines, and trailing drips of yews,  
Drench'd moistures of all fragrance, where the  
                    sound

Clung deadened as it leapt from armed feet.  
They heard it and they started with fierce eyes

Father and maiden as irresolute,  
Wearily, scared to face the thing they knew.  
Wail was there none, and barely any moan ;  
They on each other gazed, touch'd hands, and  
went

With pause from stair to stair on shivering limbs,  
And, issuing thro' the column'd archway, stood,  
Pale in great light and paler from its power.  
Then from the leaves there wended shield and  
helm :

It seemed the flower of knights with some great  
wrong

Concluded, for no pride was in their tread ;  
But they crept on like walkers from their sleep,  
Staring and thronging, knot by knot, they came :  
And in the midmost core of that dumb band  
A something propt in slumber on a bier,  
Or, slumber's sequel, death ; where paced besides  
Sorrowful lords in frequency with fixt gaze  
Sword-rooted, shapes of still dismay ; not all  
The crowded twitters of the tender year,

The moving vapour lights, the tremulous sheaths  
Of ardent petals, the glazed under-shades,  
The free divine excess of such a morn,  
Could lift one careless eyelid, or give pulse  
And burnish to their miserable brows.

Fast by the portals of that ancient pile  
They laid their burden down, and bared the face  
And bared the breast-plate where the spear-head  
lay

Broken, the truncheon on an inch of stave.  
But all the face seem'd noble, for the Knight  
Lay with the shadow of an earthly smile  
Between his severed lips; the high brow calm,  
And passing calm the frozen cheek of death.

Then the old King cried out and turn'd and sank,  
Prone reeling all his bulk across the bier,  
And wildly finger'd at the dead man's wound,  
Or cherish'd, vainly pleading, the limp hands :  
Moaning and whispering out his soul : and fast

His moving pupils wandered in a gloom  
Of eyebrow : Then he bow'd himself and ceased,  
Stifled in silence with his wrinkled face  
And craving touch yet stedfast on the dead.

But she his daughter in her glistening hair  
Moved up and dropt no tears and made to speak,  
Bound in the calm that shows excessive pain  
Most awful, and her accents faltered not :

‘Come ye thus laden from the shock of spears,  
Mute faces once heroic, and moist eyes  
That coped with fame in the fierce sun and glare  
Of danger blenching nothing. Is this all  
Ye warrior hands to bring me? Some far time  
Shall chronicle upon you full dispraise  
Deep, bitter, unforgotten in this word—

“These came unwounded home, but brought their  
Lord

Dead, and forgot due vengeance for the slain.”

Ye are angry now : 'tis something ; I would hurl

Your recreant footsteps to old fields, and tear  
The victory from the victors, as Remorse  
Should stand a flaming demon in your rear  
Flame-sworded, barring off retreat, till blood  
Be paid in kind, and this perpetual shame  
Transfigured to a trophied sign, which bays  
And myrtle wreath for ever.

I have said  
My bitterness : forgive me. Ye are brave :  
Your vengeance will not loiter, is most sure.  
This is my grief that speaks, and not my heart.

And now, O brother, thou that hearest not  
What love I murmur o'er thee, nor the lips  
Which tell it, but, if thou couldst hear, no sense  
Could word my inmost sorrow : chilly sleep  
Hath bound thee as the lichen clasps the rock :  
Desolate sleep that holds us from the lips  
We most desire ; the long hour fades the tree,  
But hard when cruel April plays the game  
Of autumn in the tender starry green.

Brother, the full deep look of love is thine,  
Clouding, and, ere it cloud, the tranquil flower  
Shall move above thee to the sun, and cup  
Mirrors of dew, and roof about thy head  
With whispering undulation. We remain  
For lonely winters and our hearth is bare ;  
And homeless home is strangered with a shade,  
That moves us weeping from familiar doors.

Pale brow, pale hand, and sweet unlustrous eyes,  
Farewell : hereafter, when this memory lives  
How once you were, be gentle, my great grief,  
Upon the retrospect, let me endure  
To tell new days some dwarfish chronicle  
Of thy triumphal honour, and hold bright  
The burnish of thy deeds in alien times.

Now, once his comrades, raise this fallen length  
Of all we loved, your leader, ere it fade.  
And thou, old King, have comfort and arise.  
Or feign some mock of comfort till this grave



Close in with rite and ritual of the dead,  
'Then—then weep out your measure, frail old eyes.'

She said, and raised her trembling father; they  
Bent to their burden with no voice and feet  
Of solemn pacing, two on two they wound  
Thro' that domed archway, till the place was void  
And very still, save when a hoarse black bell  
Croak'd out a raven requiem on the slain.

## A FAREWELL.

OUR love is dust : the rainbow mist is torn :  
The old pulse beats, the old eye sees the true :  
The mirage withers and the sand remains.  
Our love is worn, and strange thy languid lips,  
Thy cold arm burns not on my neck, and smooth  
Those very accents as a frozen marge  
Whereby the dead flower blackens into dust.  
Come, we have loved ; 'tis something : let it pass.  
Shall this endure in man whose breath is change  
To build itself a careless citadel  
Safe in the teeth of years, when all things fail  
Before them ? It is something to enjoy  
And own the power to taste this sweet of change  
Nor curse its fading, faded. I accept

The limit of the illusion with no tear,  
And, freely gone, I close the door, nor stir  
One beck to lure it backwards.

Strange and sweet

Its coming breathed of distant fields : its voice  
'Thro' tremulous meadows with a child's soft hand  
Led where the crowded Iris of their floor  
Burst out in burning spring : a mist, a touch,  
My sense in deep blooms melted out to sleep ;  
And there I dream'd thee lovely and this love  
Eternal. Till the windy seeds of hail  
Flapt me awake ; I shuddered : a black wind  
Search'd bitter clouds for tempest, greenless flats  
Whence the last herb had starved in blistering  
shale,  
A jumbled quarry where the very dust  
Held frozen-caked in shelf and cups of crag.

Come, we have much to breathe for : deed and  
days

Have music still, and life yet moves our veins :

And though the garland rose hereafter hang  
Dishonoured and dispetalled : if our touch  
Be not to any hand, no lip to ours,—  
This world will turn although we say farewell.

## THE ANSWER.

FREE, thou art free, rask changeling of the  
hour :

Why then farewell, and all at once farewell :

Pass from the hearth of this still breast for aye.

What should I speak? Thou know'st thyself,  
and I

Am darken'd by some fuller birth of smiles.

In her sweet hour I dwindle and recede :

There, if some thought of our once love intrude.

Stray dissonance, between the shrine and heart

Of long melodious concords, may it thrill

The honey'd sequel to a richer close.

If this be well that we should greet no more.

Hereafter passing with incurious eyes.

Who held such state of our eternal love,  
And deem'd, weak fools, that these our hearts  
                  were set  
As near as bud to flower, as babe to breast ;  
And finish as we finished, fools of change,  
To shake asunder meanly, at one touch,  
For always, as an angry balsam seed  
Leaps from its parent stem on alien winds.

I have had some wrong and I shall shed some  
                  tears.

I speak not of myself: let that go by.  
We chide not on this melted light that rode  
In arrogant pitch, soon overborne: new rays  
Quench'd it like mist and all its heaven was bare.

Have I the heart to crush this dream and smile,  
Nor let one errant thought's memorial flow  
And shape the stream of what we might have  
                  been?

Have I the soul to shield my soul with scorn,

Like braggart men, the broken dupes of time,  
Once reaching stars and lords of incident?  
The dark road bends before me where I tread,  
The arm that stay'd my spring, deserts my fall,  
And I am lonely in the leafy winds,  
And very lonely in the wasted year,  
Grinding November wrecks on gusty skies,  
And strengthless save one purpose to begone.

I rail not on the veering tyrant man,  
Ape of all change, whose fierce inabstinence  
Gulps at illusion, as with eager jaw  
The barr'd fish loves the glitter of a rag.  
Who, since most changeful of all breathing things,  
Would rail against the unenduring rocks  
And make their weather'd constancy his own.

Say you we part henceforward, and farewell?  
The dumb slow days teach much and may teach  
thee.

Thrive on thy fill and rule the flowering time,

In stately roses under crowded bloom,  
Wear down the mutinous echo of this wrong!  
I turn, I raise towards fuller heights my eyes,  
Farewell—since thou wilt have it—and farewell!



## I.

THE crocus, snow-drop, primrose, violet,  
    Outrun their tardy brethren to foretell  
The icy tyrant's limit, and the swell  
Of buds, the green dilation sudden-set

Between the forest arch an arching net,  
Voiced with the eloquence of secret throats,  
Vocal by long suspense, in tremulous notes  
Calling electric Spring. She, nebulous yet,

Steams up, a sleepy vapour, from the rills  
Souging their ice like broken glass aside  
Under the warm wind's mouth. Not less her craft

Strives at the heart of frozen loams, and fills  
The pores of nature with her plastic tide  
From the alp blossom to the miner's shaft.

## II.

IS it because the summer is so nigh  
That thou, crush'd heart, hast caught some  
mystic glow?

Why, numb in tears, dost thou disdain reply,  
Changed from the level empire of thy woe?

As some poor moth with languid creeping wings,  
How faded-torn the burnish of thy prime,  
How mean thy future yoked with meanest things,  
An heir of desolation to all time.

All gentle things with use grow false and sour,  
The heart is sour when years the cheek deform,  
The wavering planet of the lovers' bower  
Burns out the constellation of the storm,—

And yet one year of kindness from those eyes  
Would cancel all the wrong time multiplies.

## III.

WHY should we loiter on this wavering sand,  
Training the world at last to hear our will :  
Why should we thrust our foreheads to its brand  
And kneel and burn our abject incense still,

Serving to rule, dissembling to fulfil ?  
Let this world-idol grin with idiot shape :  
Let the wise crowd, in wrestling fervour shrill,  
Pray to the measured shadow of this ape,

And strangle Hope with each accursed prayer.  
Then, to their wish, like birds that concourse flows,  
One, a spring thrush, the upmost twig has bent  
And cracks his heart with piping to the air :

Some, for worm banquet stalk as strutting crows  
Behind the furrows of world government.

## IV.

ROSY delight that changest day by day  
From dearest growing to a dearer favour,  
Whom Thought and Sinew bondsmen to obey,  
Slave out thy least command and may not waver.

My recompense and zenith of reward,  
Bourn of all effort, thought behind all thinking,  
Regent of sleep and centre of regard  
Whereon the wakeful soul will pore unshrinking.

I cannot count the phases of this love,  
Measure its growth or vindicate its reason.  
I cannot doubt; the very smile that wove  
My soul with love withholds me from love's treason.

I only know thou art my best delight,  
Food of sweet thoughts and sum of all things bright.

## V.

WHEN the day glooms my passion is at rest,  
For thou hast nothing of the gloomy hour.  
But when the face of day is gaudy dressed,  
I trace thee imaged in each summer flower.

I think the earth is glorious, and I know  
We twain might pace it under glorious stars :  
To miss this crown of joy, my chiefest woe  
New rankles sickly thought's half-healing scars.

Is the sky soft, and does the resting sun  
Glow from the undercloud till wood and sky  
Are glory-mantled? Am I not alone?  
Let her be near and let the world go by,

Pass on with curious ears, and scornful eyes,  
Or listless looks, a cankered heart's disguise.

## VI.

I LOOK'D across the river for the morn.

The clouds came not, the air was very slow,  
Till on the region past an underglow  
And scorch'd the glimmering mantle of the dawn.

Then one clear star set in a branch of rose  
Drew in before the river of bold light  
Foiling the ragged clouds to left and right,  
To sort a crystal lake of raying glows.

I could not rest ; a wilderness of mind  
Was strong within me ; love and shame and thought  
Of days behind, at that one instant caught  
To reason from the mental store-house blind.

Last thou, fair lily head, beyond night's fall  
Steep'd in warm sleep, sweet central wish of all !

## VII.

I QUESTION'D with the amber daffodils,  
Sheeting the floors of April, how she fared ;  
Where king-cup buds glowed out between the rills  
And celandine in wide gold beadlets glared.

By pastured brows and swelling hedge-row bowers  
From crumpled leaves the primrose bunches slip,  
My hot face roll'd in their faint-scented flowers,  
I dreamt her rich cheek rested on my lip.

All weird sensations of the fervent prime  
Were like great harmonies, whose touch could move  
The glow of gracious impulse : thought and time  
Renewing love with life and life with love.

When this old world new-born puts glories on,  
I cannot think thou never wilt be won.

## VIII.

IF ever, in the waste of time unborn,  
An hour shall come when thou shalt curse our  
meeting ;

When ruin'd Love in ashes of self-scorn  
Smiles a hard smile his own confusion greeting ;

An hour when Faith is broken on the wheel,  
And Hope, self-strangled in her own despair,  
Sees Memory grinding down with iron heel  
The small flower-faces that would spring elsewhere ;

If then, perchance, with dull and altered eyes,  
Thou comest to me and sayest "lo thy deed,  
The temple thou hast shaken—how it lies  
Wasted and bare and broken round with weed"—

Ah Love—*one* fault was ours, the fault of change ;  
The rest is pure ; this poison left us strange.



## IX.

MY heart is vext with this fantastic fear,—  
Had I been born too soon or far away,  
Then had I never known thy beauty, dear,  
And thou hadst spent on others all thy May.

The idle thought can freeze an idle brain  
Faint at imagined loss of such dear prize ;  
I pore upon the slender chance again,  
That taught me all the meaning of those eyes.

But creeps a whisper with a treason tongue—  
Had'st never sunn'd beneath this maiden's glance  
Another Love thou hadst as madly sung,  
For Love is certain but the loved one chance.

Deject and doubtful thus I forge quaint fear,  
But question little, Love, when thou art near.

## X.

O THOU rich vision, thou hast plunged this  
day

After thy dreaming upon discontent,  
Yearnings that search a rack of dreams, or pray  
For clouds, or track sweet music where it went.

For even if she would stoop, as in the dream  
Whose sweetness leaves an odour round my brain,  
Would I accept the offering, though a beam  
Of heaven disclosed to flood my sense again?

Nay; for the close of that tumultuous joy,  
Slain with itself, should make me love her less,  
Cankering the perfect bloom with mean employ,  
Finding a sequel of unworthiness,

In that which cannot taint and cannot sin,  
Purer than aught beside this old world in.

## XI.

SWEET, thou art gone and I must write a word  
To tell how I have loved thee, and how clear  
The memory of thy presence shall record  
Thy dearest eyes thro' many a lapsing year,

The sweetest face that ever maiden wore,  
The kind true heart, the nameless sympathy,  
Perfect of flaw rich youth in all its store—  
Dear little thing, I love thee fixedly.

Fair little form, how precious every fold  
Of thy grey dress : each glancing shade how sweet  
Of movement, from the ringlet-woof of gold  
To those dear steps and tiny-printed feet.

Ah, love, I love thee so, yet my weak praise  
Thinks with full heart, but speaks in old love-lays.

## XII.

RECORD is nothing, and the hero great  
Without it; the vitality of fame  
Is more than monument or fading state  
That leaves us but the echo of a name.

Rumour, imperial mistress of the time,  
Is slandered where she feigns no specious lies,  
Caters no reticence of cringing rhyme,  
To blow her dust-cloud full on unborn eyes—

The glory of the shows of gilded shields,  
Wild music, fluttering blazons,—and 'tis all.  
Lonely the dead men stare on battlefields,—  
Can glory reach them now tho' clarions call?

Some shadow of their onset's broken gleam  
May yet outlast the pageant and the dream.

## XIII.

RAISE thro' the tempest thine immortal eyes,  
When the sere earth is shaken like a wave ;  
When the sick racking trees with anguish sighs  
Tear up their spurry fastenings, as they rave,

Branches all wild for aidance. Gird the cloud,  
Child of the equinox ! unfold thy wings ;  
Thy brows are moist, and thy fierce hands are loud  
Snapping the crowns of ancient forest-kings.

The pines upon the pine-ridge crash and slide,  
The cataract has caught them, in a smoke  
Of rain and mountain-waters : near and wide  
The double mountain-voice in terror woke.

Crash on, frail planet, sad for aye to me ;  
Sad as my faltering life whirl'd on with thee.

## XIV.

SHE came, the fire of heaven upon her brow,  
And dared not glance upon the face of day  
With her meek eyes, as shrinking from the glow  
Of this rough world, a maiden pure away.

And I who held this miracle of shadows,  
This pearl of fancy, precious as the dreams  
Of angels rested in their violet meadows—  
Have known her smiles for lying mirage gleams :

And I who saw no taint in this pure snow  
Too white to harbour near the alien ground,  
Have touched the surface veil and bared below  
The poisoned lees of all dishonour found—

And, trustless where I trusted, flaunt in scorn  
For trustful men my broken wings forlorn.

## XV.

LIVES that are patch'd of trifles with no thread  
Of purpose, aimless as the days of birds,  
Spending in no prevision deed and words,  
Weaklings of chance ; as troops without a head

That pause and fear and vanish, when instead  
These same had crush'd the phalanx in its war  
Or torn the bastion'd rampant rock and bar  
And forc'd the very cope of hardihead—

The paltriness of lives with no beyond,  
Days roll to months and months result in years,  
The man no inch the nobler as he nears

His problem's end, that puts him from his bond  
With nature, and no reverence on his wane,  
His grave forgetful silence or disdain.

## XVI.

I F in the mental man, as with his growth,  
Time alters and repairs with silent feet,  
And we are fools of Circumstance the cheat,  
Or drugg'd beneath the hemlock wine of Sloth.

We give the fickle years a slavish troth,  
Withholding not the soul's stability  
Ring'd round and fenced from mutability.  
One stream takes all the willing and the loth.

Go barren plea perpetual to despair ;  
Inaction numbs the freshness of the powers,  
Leaves the disease and taints the remedy ;

Better to dare and fail than not to dare ;  
Rest is unrest that drowzes jostling hours,  
Poison sweet sleep that lets occasion by.



## THE WOUNDED KING.

A FRAGMENT.

HE rests and moves not with the moving woods.

The sleet-winds cannot bite him from his dream,  
Nor region thunder tho' it grind the hills  
Command an eyelash tremble. Rest and dream  
More awful than the clench of maniac hands,  
Here in the sweeping hiss that shreds the pines,  
Here by the driven mere's wild suck and foam,  
That soughs in shudder under pendulous lips  
Of turfy rivage, tearing. Not the voice  
Of the sweet year moving her buds at noon,  
Nor that full fervour of the spring's desire,  
Fluttering the foliaged quires, could half unseal  
The trancing darkness of those muffled eyes.

Where is that army now, the pageant war,  
Whereat the vaulted hills, in cope and crag  
Seeming to shake, drew clamour like a fear  
On many a chiding echo? Where are these  
That seem'd so calm, so strong in their array?

Wide on the downs by wrinkled tarn and edge  
Of ghastly moon-light, each in shatter'd mail,  
The dead men lie, clench'd hands and earnest eyes,  
Out under night, they have forgot their fame.  
And fall by fall the mountain crystal sheds  
A tainted glimmer on from rill to mere.  
The rainy winds flap past and cease again.  
The stain'd moon rolls and ceases. Shelterless  
The raven screaming reels upon the night.  
It seems the sacred dawn should come no more,  
No more should clothe the desecrated hills,  
Serenest, on their crests with timid haze  
Or rosy glory from the secret sun.

Dead are his heroes all, but not their King :

His burning wound yet holds him from the seat  
Of heroes and the precincts of their rest.  
His soul on shadows of unresting thought  
Flits to his bride in anguish—where is she?

There is a palace builded on a mere,  
And mere-waves sound about it, sweet or shrill  
As lends the season impulse: and old trees  
Are sequel to the voices of the waves  
Behind it: and beyond it heaven is clomb  
Of some aerial glacier, native rest  
To pausing thunders when the vale is spread  
Trembling in trembling vapour fed with sun.  
A nest for ancient kings to take repose  
Between the mountains, musing dreams of power.

Her lattice gave across the restless floor  
Of nightly waters paved with faintest gales  
In shaken lines of splendour and sweet gleam.  
The moon was very sweet between the trees.

The island sedges whisper'd idle dreams,  
And wakeful fountains wrestled deep in flowers.

Whereon she gazed ambrosial from her rest,  
In parted lawns and samite canopies,  
Tangled in moonlight, Danæe-like, a queen.  
There is no guess of sorrow in her eyes,  
As leaning radiant towards the mellow night  
She hears a bugle throb —

## A FUTURE.

THY lore may be the vocal memories  
Of idols overthrown, imperial hours :  
Thy lute may moan perpetual monodies  
Of desecrated bowers.

Thy creed may be to move in solemn shade,  
With drooping head, a dream upon an earth  
Of careless creatures—proudly disarray'd  
Of any masking mirth.

Thy rest may be a rest we cannot know—  
Beyond sleek envy's scorn and cant of sneers—  
Pervaded with the secret strength of woe,  
Yet consecrate to tears.

BE WISE IN TIME.

DISPOSE thy loves in realms of mellow flowers :

Truth is not fooled to make his stay with thee.

Thy faith is but the burnish of the hours,

And freedom is a nobler thing than love.

So let me be

Free as the cloud or river to remove.

Rosebud, thou art to judge thee by the eyes.

Time now thy slave shall be thy master soon

To quench of light those oracles of lies,

Twin-curtain'd shrines, and jar to barren string

The tender tune

Thy lips could murmur like the gales of spring.

Leave—leave these restless hours whose spice is  
dust.

So use delight and so command desire ;  
Exchange thy tinsel oaths for honest trust,  
Ere twilight mar the fulness of thy day,  
And shades attire  
The glowing fields of love in altered gray.

## AT EVENING.

THE pilgrim cranes are moving to their south.  
The clouds are herded pale and moving slow.  
One flower is wither'd in the warm wind's mouth,  
Whereby the gentle waters always flow.

O thou pervasive thought of glorious pain,  
Release me yet at seasons from thy power:  
Thou other self investing sense and brain,  
Renew me, or I perish hour by hour.



## A LAMENT.

O GENTLE day and milky cloud,  
O faint and flowing sea,  
More fair than human estimate  
I read the story of your state—  
If you could comfort me!

O gloom of clouds and rocking boughs,  
Thou fierce and furrow'd sea,  
Boom round yon isles of dreamy glow,  
And strow the rose with driven snow,  
That cannot comfort me.

STANZAS.

WAIT—ay the hours bring night and night  
brings morn,

The old wheel forces on the waning day :  
Wait, till the pale tomorrow shall be born  
As little gracious, and in turn decay.

Rest is a cloud above the evening sun  
That sees him set, nor fails in steadfast sphere :  
Peace is a moon that when the stars are done  
Without a twinkle sleeps upon a mere :

But still to pause, and pausing taste no rest,  
And still to drowse and droop and know no peace,  
Is this thy portion, life, thy sense unblest,  
In storm to dote on calm, in pain on ease ?

## ALLOWANCE.

“WILT thou be true, God’s comfort guide thy  
brain ;

If false, high grace bereave thine after-rest,  
As sunset anchor’d in the beaming west  
Is over-dulled to leaden taint again.”

False is as fate shall choose, not men ordain.

True, oft untried, where false is vanquish’d  
truth.

Cold blood is fixt, where fickle heated youth ;  
Praise one, blame either, or blame both and twain.

Shall one assume the scales and judgment-throne,  
Touching my outward merely with blear eyes,  
Measure the trespass, hug himself for wise,  
Tell me the world demands I should atone !

Grave world of flawless virtue, lift the stone.

Brave world of mincing honour, dole and deal,

And fidget shame out with thy mouth of meal,

But let the polish'd reprobate alone.

A SONG.

O FAIREST thou,  
Tearing the silk-leaved blooms in waywardness,  
Thy pretty feet upon the smooth-faced flowers,  
Can I forget  
To crown thee with the worship of a song?

O fair and sweet,  
Thou movest in thine harmony among  
The lavish spring and all her twinkling bowers,  
Why should I set  
Thy lyric loveliness to harsher song?

## A SKETCH AT EVENING.

THE whip cracks on the plough-team's flank,  
The thresher's flail beats duller.

The round of day has warm'd a bank  
Of clouds to primrose colour.

And dairy-girls cry home the kine,  
The kine in answer lowing,

And rough-haired louts with sleepy shouts  
Keep crows, where seed is growing.

The creaking wain, brush'd thro' the lane,  
Hangs straws on hedges narrow;  
And smoothly cleaves the soughing plough,  
And harsher grinds the harrow.

Or, from the road-side inn caught up,  
A brawl of crowded laughter,  
Thro' falling brooks and cawing rooks,  
And a fiddle scrambling after.

## FRAGMENT OF AN ALLEGORY.

MY tale is but a shadow and a sign.

Between the column'd summits broadly strown,  
The billowy light converged to blood-red zone.  
Lovely, and waning as a thing divine,  
Came eve, as even never came before,  
With red-gray rush to stagger to their core  
Eternal steeps, mysterious; by whose crest  
The floated vapour shattering over-bore  
The bleak-eyed raven in his glacier nest.  
Not less, when all the naked summits wore  
An echo-warmth against their iris west,  
Failed out the silken melancholy gleam  
Celestial, failing under spectral ways,  
All blindness, whence the sky-prevailing rays



Are lost, as some great thought that threads a dream,  
And lost the crimson wreaths that ring'd the burn-  
ing stream.

There sat the glittering heights immoveable,  
Roof'd with the sun and stair'd in ridgey seams,  
Holding the folded azure's vapour streams ;  
And from those heights a level dull and grey,  
Dull as its sand and pale as pale decay,  
Dispread perpetual towards a shining sea  
That was but mirage cloud, which blent away  
And to the skies glow'd vast and mightily.

'There an old man was seated on a bulk  
Of salt, that beasts had lick'd in pits and jags,  
With great knees huddled towards his chin, and  
shrunk

His lean ring'd throat which fell in fleshless bags.  
Above him spread illimitable crags,  
And gray lights trembled from them : and his arm  
Trembled from wrist to elbow where his face

Rested ; the other moved not from its place  
Saving to screen his eyes, when over-warm  
A chance gleam wounding bit their weak white  
                  scums :

And then he mumbled groans and stirr'd his mouth  
To show one wolf-tooth hung in rusty gums ;  
Nodding with ague, if the whispering south  
Breathed but to puff a thistle seed along,  
And the woods bloom'd beneath it : yet his limbs  
Were palsied, and a wrinkling shiver strong  
Winning fierce way from foot to forehead climbs.

For wizard he had been of knowledge ripe,  
But that a stronger weird had chain'd him there  
In this perpetual solitude. The gripe  
Of age was on him, and a lean despair  
Of impotence that held him from his share  
In those delights his stronger years had fed :  
They, blasted as the scalp of his foul head  
In seamy gaps or slimy mats of hair,  
Had perish'd inch-meal, but the ache lived on

In that great mesh of ruin, made its lair  
By all corruption ; as the fire-worm's glow  
Among the rotting leaves. There, woe-begone,  
He sate, and on the furthest peaky snow  
He lifted melancholy eye-balls, rolling slow.

Ay, on the limit of eternal rock,  
Or on the upper limitless expanse,  
Or where lake mirrors crossing clouds bemock,  
Painting as sharp below their plumed advance,  
As one that sees such prospect in a trance,  
He gazed, and gazing doubted all he saw  
For phantom mist or mirage : and he loathed  
The stately hills past loathing, glory-clothed,  
And found in fairest thing a falsehood and a flaw,  
Doubting himself besides and loathing nature's law.

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## THE OLD WARRIOR.

ONCE more on rock and chasm the gilded eve  
Sets into flying lights of pale-rayed fire,  
And yet again the retinue of clouds,  
Above the sun-fall, veined with rushing gleams,  
Drag out their chain of crumbling island crags,  
Lovely to all but these my leaden eyes.

The blind and barren life-lamp of my brain  
Fails out unkindled at this certain round  
Of visible beauty, and I hunger change  
Nor earthward find it, if not this slow orb  
Divides his rest some hand-breadths to the north,  
And crimsons icier summits fall by fall.  
Thy tune is old, old elm-tree, as the wind

Shakes out thy leafy sails ; hast been my rest  
These many changeless years. Perchance thy voice  
Shall float between the bells, when I am laid  
Beside the kirk-tower yonder in their ranks,  
O'er whom the voices of the bells peal prayer,  
And rolling organs, yet they will not come.

I am forgotten from the files of war.  
At times I fancy that old self of mine  
Has faded out and left a nerveless hull.  
Ay me, that I am fallen from my praise,  
This is the bitter sequel of our time ;  
Thus he the human demigod to-day  
Shook off, mere bruised lumber, on the next,  
Pines out in dreamy memories what has been,  
Blurr'd with the silence of the things to come :  
An ancient watch-tower that has served its turn,  
A rampart on the pathless blasts, a fire  
To watch and cheat the shrill waves of their prey,  
Now stain'd and patch'd with ruin and disuse,  
Rots stagnant in time's shadow stone by stone.

Why should man live declined? the noble years  
Perish, and quavering dotage, garrulous,  
Unsays his own renown with witless prate,  
Self-wounding calumny. The glowing eye  
Is faded; shrunken arms and trembling hands  
Unmeet for wars. The measure of his time  
Has numb'd his drooping manhood lock'd in calm.

O rusted harness, dost thou speak reproach?  
I shall not wear thee, for my veins are slow,  
Until thou case my unremembered dust.  
Old brand, art shamed with my unsinew'd gripe?  
Old gauntlet spacious for the wasted hand,  
'Tis long since maiden fingers touch'd thy palm.  
Long, since bright ringlets pillow'd on my mail,  
For some deliverance wrought, some dread o'er-  
thrown.

Lo, as a dead and stranger'd thing I rust,  
Out-lived into an age I cannot reap,  
And sunder'd from the vigour of my time.

Unlink'd from current action and renown.

I see them sometimes, the new blood, fair knights,  
Come plumed and spur'd and glistening down the  
vale.

I crane from this rock edge with misty eyes ;  
Or, when the tilts are toward, down I crawl  
As far as yonder road-bend to the town,  
My utmost limit ; deemed in age as far  
As my youth held the miles to Palestine.

I cheat the grave too long with bloodless days,  
Ripe tribute to the pale and iron sleep.  
I cheat my weary heirs of heritage,  
Greying their locks and warping all their youth.  
I shall not vex them long. The waste is set  
Before me and the darkness. I shall pass  
Upon it with a firm old heart, and turn  
To nameless sleep undaunted as forgot.  
The accident of record cannot change  
The man to lesser, or contract the soul  
That has been, shadow'd outwardly to men

In functions and in purposes achieved,  
Tho' crusting years have blurr'd its name away.  
That flash of glory, the majestic deed  
Has still its greatness in oblivion  
Great then, and now, and always. Its reward  
Vital within its doing, self-sustain'd,  
Recks not the voices of the after-years.



## THE ARCADIAN SHEPHERD.

LOVE of the rosy neck, the restless hair,  
The vales are breezeless, and the ring-dove's  
voice

Sweetens or ebbs her patient aching pipe,  
Delicious throes of one old monody,  
Told and retold, immortal, to the hours.  
The footsteps of the sunlight, steam'd in blue,  
Melt from the veiled portals of the flowers  
A cloudiness of dews, like trembling dust  
Behind the wayfarer: the onward lengths  
Fall bevill'd, seas of leaves and branching plains,  
Whereon the high noon striking, draws beneath  
In films of glimmering azure, zone by zone.  
And all the broad and creeping splendour-flakes  
Hover or wane their ripple woofs of floor.

The swan, who by the sacred courses feeds,  
Beam-caught has made one star-point of his down.

Thy shepherd in the shadows of the hills,  
I teach the forest lawns my trembling notes  
And brooding modulation of my loves,  
Where ripe noon sows the lazy woods with flowers,  
Moss-hyacinth and wind blooms and the rings  
Of purple vetches dazzling some sere pine  
With intertissued bravery as it dies—  
With love that comes too late in narrow time :  
*I*ve love a little here and fall asleep  
In earth : the fresh woods mix not with our dreams.  
The dead are past our grieving ; not for these  
The tamarisk thickets waver, or the Hours  
Teach music to the branch, nor fountain-head  
Wakefully pulses out ambrosial sleep,  
With wave-drift, rainbows, and far-silvered heights  
Breaking along its changes towards the dawn.

Deny not. love, for love is short in prime.

So short, the fruit scarce ripe, the bloom-down fades ;  
Reap in these fluttering moments ere they change,  
Loved or unloved the rough wind strips the tree.

Nay, rather come and rest beside me here,  
The martens titter round the silver rock,  
The wood-bee hoarding in a wealth of combs ;  
Nay come, I wait thee elbow-deep in flowers.  
The deep woods swoon with solitude divine ;  
Grape clusters, ivy, poppies, tumbled pears,  
The gush of streams, and vistas of the Sun  
Leaning his sacred forehead towards the waves.

Come, ere one sterile leaf of autumn sways,  
Come, ere one crisp bough sickens to the doom  
Of winter : ere the coronal I laid  
Breathless beneath the lintel of thy bower  
Has pined its crumpling petals with delay  
Sick for thy spicy tresses. Dearest, come,  
Where under umbrage of delicious coves  
The dusty cygnets watch their gleaming sires,

And sedge-hair brushes the rosed filbert's cheek,  
And bunch and reed shake pictured in the wave.  
There, halcyons crown the under-gliding calm,  
There, the kid, blinking in the sweet-flag net,  
Butts thro' the osier-thick narcissus fringe ;  
His eager nostrils dwell in leaning thirst,  
And sailing fishes watch him, golden-eyed.

Cruel ! I waste my piping and my heart ;  
The rocks have answer'd, but thy voice is dumb.  
The nightingales change music with the doves ;  
The thrush remurmurs, emulous of song.  
Thou speakest not, and, widowed of thy voice,  
The solitudes of pine are tranced with fear.  
Thy proud limbs move not in the tangled fern.  
Silent art thou, as some snow-freighted cloud,  
Robed in a frigid glory, cold and calm ;  
With cruel lips and very noble eyes.  
And thou hast filled my heart, as some first dove  
Possesses with one song the early woods.  
Scornful and fair, in time relent—return !

Where ripe days flout the gracious dues of love,  
Sere Age in sequel deals self-hating hours  
Of solitary wrinkles unbeloved.  
So thou relent, and reap the barren years.  
Arise, and Love shall guide thee thro' the meads,  
By rooted lilies, wonders of the spring,  
By vermeil-curtain'd poppies deep in grain,  
And all the fair ripe summer thro' the land ;  
Until his finger on my threshold rest,  
My home is yonder and my home is thine.

FINIS.





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